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SUBJECT: BARSHCHEVSKIY BULLISH ON MEDVEDEV

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Mikhail Barshchevskiy, leader of the political party Civic Force that co-sponsored ruling party candidate Dmitriy Medvedev, described Russia's next president as shrewd, highly intelligent, and independent, and predicted he would master the presidency - allowing Putin to bow out. While Civic Force garnered only a percentage in the national Duma elections, Barshchevskiy touted the outcome that matched that of more established liberal parties, particularly given the party's absence of financing or access to the media. Confident that liberalism is not dead in Russia, Barshchevskiy maintained that Civic Force will be well-positioned to capture the disappointed voters that an inevitable economic downturn will produce. A self-made man and an establishment figure, Barshchevskiy believes strongly that Russian politics will grow to accommodate the aspirations of an expanding middle class. End Summary

Medvedev, Russia's Next Hero

¶2. (C) In a recent meeting, Civil Forces leader Mikhail Barshchevskiy declined to clarify how his party was selected to co-nominate the First Deputy Prime Minister as president, but said he supported Dmitriy Medvedev because "each era in Russian history requires a hero." If Yeltsin was the appropriate hero to bring Russia out from under the Soviet system, it required Putin to manage the dramatic economic and social changes produced by such a change. Barshchevskiy acknowledged that he was an establishment figure, since like most Russians he respected Putin for having restored order, placed the country on solid footing, and kept the various Kremlin factions in line. Barshchevskiy pointed to Putin's political trajectory, arriving in Moscow in 1999 with very little support and mastering the presidency within two years, as Medvedev's template. In much the same way, he argued, Medvedev will enter the stage as the right person, at the right time, who can position Russia on a more liberal and institution-based track.

¶3. (C) Based on his two-hour meeting with Medvedev on December 10, contacts within the Association of Lawyers, and experience as the GOR representative to the Constitutional Court, Barshchevskiy described Medvedev as shrewd, highly intelligent, and independent. Barshchevskiy took exception to Medvedev's reputation as weak, arguing that in contrast to Putin's desire to be broadly admired and loved, Medvedev was forceful without being afraid to say "no." Barshchevskiy saw Putin's brash and forceful Munich speech as part of his public persona; whereas Medvedev could be as forceful in private as Putin had been in public, he didn't need to show

it. Barshchevskiy also touted Medvedev's economic and government administration experience, noting that whereas Putin needed to gain control over the oligarchs, independent governors, and rambunctious security forces, Medvedev would need to manage and direct the large and growing Russian economy. Barshchevskiy was relentlessly upbeat on Medvedev's prospects: while Putin's imprimatur may be required to deal with Kremlin in-fighting in the short term, in the near-term Medvedev would master the office and allow Putin to bow out.

Liberalism Is Not Dead

¶4. (C) Although Civic Force received only 1.05 percent of the vote in the December Duma elections, Barshchevskiy hailed the results as a success. Without much campaigning, press coverage, or financing, Civic Force garnered the same outcome as more established liberal parties, out-scoring the Union of Right Forces (0.97 percent) and polling only slightly less than Yabloko (1.59 percent). Barshchevskiy touted the party's appeal to voters he described as reasonable, young and with Western values. He spun the party's low showing positively, claiming that outside the Duma, the party would be freer to criticize the administration and would avoid blame for unpopular policies rubberstamped by the new parliament.

¶5. (C) Separately, Civic Force's press secretary Aleksandr Agamov told us that the party continues to make strides in the regions, with the party running candidates in several of the regional elections also slated for March 2. Agamov highlighted the party's potentially strong showing in the Sverdlovsk, Yaroslavl, and Krasnodarsk Regions. Agamov predicted the party would do best in Sverdlovsk, where polls currently put Civic Force at four to five percent of the vote (although, as in the national elections, parties must overcome a seven percent barrier). Deputy Director of the Kremlin-connected Center for Political Technologies Boris Makarenko told us that Civil Force's three percent showing in Moscow during the Duma elections - in the absence of funding, campaign savvy or air-time - indicated a latent vote bank for a liberal party.

¶6. (C) Agamov argued that Civic Force was the most likely right-wing party to survive in Russia for several reasons. First, he pointed to the "hands-off Civic Force" policy from the Kremlin. In the December elections this policy allowed the party to operate unimpeded, unlike Yabloko or SPS. Second, he said that poor relations between the leadership of SPS and the Kremlin would consign that party to the margins for the foreseeable future. Third, he felt that Yabloko would continue to bear the burden of blame for the chaos of the 1990s. When the time comes (during an economic crisis, say), he was confident that Civic Force would be waiting with its liberal-democratic principles.

Comment: Bio Note

¶7. (C) Barshchevskiy is an interesting interlocutor: while not a natural politician, he continues to receive number one ranking in polls of famous lawyers, and enjoys straddling government service on the Constitutional Court with lucrative private business (where he was the first to establish a full-fledged Russian law firm, breeding partners from the graduates of elite law institutes in Moscow and St. Petersburg). He is deeply establishment, but equally convinced that contemporary Russia must begin to accommodate the political demands of an emerging middle class, as well as the aspirations of wealthy technocrats. He proudly labels himself "nouveau riche," goes out of his way to meet in the swankiest of over-priced Moscow restaurants, and is a picture of sartorial splendor (when you can see him through the cloud of cigarette smoke that his relentless chain-smoking produces). He is patriotic in other ways, with he and his wife recently adopting two toddlers from a Moscow orphanage,

"since we have enough money and can make a difference." The Barshchevskiys have an older daughter, who has finished university. The Barshchevskiys travel frequently to the U.S., where he spent two years in Washington from 1989 to 1990 working in large corporate law firm. While he understands English, Barshchevskiy prefers to speak Russian.

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